

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PARIS 03135 01 OF 03 011556Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 03135

E.79. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: IMPLICATIONS OF CHIRAC'S PARIS INITIATIVE FOR
GISCARD AND THE GOF

REF: (A) PARIS 3084; (B) PARIS 3085

SUMMARY. PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING'S STATEMENT DURING
HIS JANUARY 17 PRESS CONFERENCE THAT HE WOULD SERVE UNTIL
1981 REGARDLESS OF WHO WON NEXT YEAR'S LEGISLATIVE ELEC-
TIONS AND THAT HE INTENDED TO STAY ABOVE POLITICKING WAS
INTERPRETED BY SOME OBSERVERS AS A NOD TO THE SOCIA-
LISTS. WHETHER THIS INTERPRETATION IS TRUE OR NOT, THE
HINT WAS THE LAST STRAW FOR CHIRAC AND THE RPR, WHO
HAD BEEN SLOWLY BUT SURELY BURNING AT A SERIES OF MALA-
DRESSES AND SLIGHTS BY THE PRESIDENT AND HIS TEAM.
THEY HAVE FOUND THE PARIS MAYORAL RACE THE
BEST VEHICLE FOR SAVING THE MAJORITY FROM THE OPPOSITION,
REBALANCING THE MAJORITY OR METHODICALLY "GOING FOR" THE
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PAGE 02 PARIS 03135 01 OF 03 011556Z

PRESIDENCY-- DEPENDING ON WHOSE INTERPRETATION ONE BE-
LIEVES. THE CONSEQUENCES FOR GISCARD ARE DIFFICULT TO
ASSESS SIX WEEKS BEFORE THE ELECTION, BUT HE COULD
CURIOUSLY FIND HIMSELF IN A POSITION SIMILAR TO THAT OF
A LEFT VICTORY. CORNERED FROM BOTH SIDES, HIS ALTERNA-
TIVES MAY BE LIMITED TO ACCEPTING A MORE RPR GENERAL
POLICY OR CALLING EARLY ELECTIONS. IF CHIRAC CAREFULLY

CONTINUES TO AVOID ATTACKS ON THE PRESIDENT AND TO PREACH THAT HIS INITIATIVES ARE PURELY FOR THE PURPOSE OF RALLYING THE MAJORITY AGAINST A GROWING PS/PC COALITION, A SPLIT WITHIN THE MAJORITY CAN BE AVOIDED. END SUMMARY.

1. WHILE MOST OF THE POLITICAL ATTENTION IS PRESENTLY FOCUSED ON THE PARIS MAYOR RACE, OTHER LONGER-TERM ISSUES ARE ALSO AT STAKE: THE FUTURE COHESIVENESS OF THE GOVERNMENT MAJORITY, THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS OF MARCH 1978 AND THE POSSIBILITY OF EARLY LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS ARE THE MOST PROMINENT. IT IS NOW ACCEPTED THAT JACQUES CHIRAC HAS NOT ENTERED THE PARIS MAYOR RACE WITH THIS LIMITED PURPOSE IN MIND. INDEED WITH HINDSIGHT, EVERYTHING HE HAS DONE SINCE HE RESIGNED AS PRIME MINISTER LAST AUGUST HAS FOLLOWED A RIGOROUS LOGIC, WHOSE GUIDING PRINCIPLES WERE: MORE VIGOROUSLY TAKING ON THE OPPOSITION, CALLING FOR EARLY LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, MOBILIZING THE FRENCH ELECTORATE AND WINNING BACK SOME OF THE GAULIST VOTE WHICH HAS GONE TO THE SOCIALISTS. EACH STEP ALONG CHIRAC'S FIVE-MONTH PATH HAS BEEN TAKEN WITH THESE IDEAS IN MIND -- FROM HIS TART DEPARTURE STATEMENT AT THE MATIGNON, HIS QUICK DECISION TO RUN FOR DEPUTY FROM THE CORREZE, HIS SPEECH AT EGLETON, THE DECEMBER EXTRAORDINARY ASSIZES AND FINALLY HIS BID FOR THE PARIS CITY HALL.

2. CHIRAC'S CAMPAIGN HAS NOT BEEN A SINGLE-HANDED EFFORT. PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING HAS BEEN MORE THAN ACCOMMODATING.

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PARIS 03135 01 OF 03 011556Z

DATING BY HIS RETIRING STYLE OF GOVERNING, COMPOUNDED BY A NUMBER OF TACTICAL ERRORS, THE LAST OF THESE IN TIME, AND THE MOST SERIOUS, WAS HIS MANNER OF SELECTING "MAJORITY" CANDIDATE D'ORNANO. PRETENDING THAT THE FORMAL STRUCTURE FOR ARBITRATING THE MAYORALTY RACE (GUICHARD, LECANUET, PONIATOWSKI -- AND BARRE IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS) WOULD FORECLOSE THE RPR FROM RUNNING ITS OWN CANDIDATE, GISCARD MADE TWO SERIOUS AND PARADOXICAL ERRORS: HE GAVE THE LIE TO THE THESIS THAT THE NEW LAW PROVIDING FOR THE FIRST MAYOR OF PARIS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OVER 100 YEARS WOULD FREE PARIS FROM THE TUTELAGE OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT; AND HE TRIED TO ARBITRATE PARIS LIKE ANY OTHER FRENCH CITY. WHEN GISCARD THEN HARKED ON THE MERITS OF PLURALISM WITHIN THE MAJORITY IN HIS JANUARY 17 PRESS CONFERENCE, HE LEFT HIMSELF OPEN TO CHIRAC'S LATEST FORWARD CHARGE.

3. THIS BACKGROUND IS RELEVANT BECAUSE THE PRESENT RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE MAJORITY HAVE NOT BASICALLY

CHANGED AND MAY NOT IN THE FUTURE. THE RPR IS STILL THE

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 PARIS 03135 02 OF 03 011602Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 PARIS 03135

LARGEST PART OF THE PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY AND AN ESSEN-
TIAL ELEMENT OF THE GOF CABINET; LOGIC WOULD STILL DIC-
TATE THAT THE MAJORITY PARTIES AVOID A RUPTURE; AND
PARIS, UP UNTIL NOW A MAJORITY CITY, WILL MOST LIKELY
CONTINUE SO. HOWEVER, THERE IS THE NEW ELEMENT THAT THE
NEW POST OF PARIS MAYOR COULD BECOME THE MOST IMPORTANT
OFFICE IN FRANCE AFTER THOSE OF THE PRESIDENCY AND PRIME
MINISTER. IN ADDITION, CHIRAC CERTAINLY REGARDS IT AS A
STEPPING STONE TO AN EVEN MORE IMPORTANT ROLE NATIONALLY.
SMARTING EVER SINCE IT LOST FIRST THE ELYSEE AND THEN
THE MATIGNON, THE RPR, PARTICULARLY ITS DEPUTIES, HAVE
BECOME MORE PUGNACIOUS TOWARD THE REST OF THE GOF. HOW
THEN WILL THESE NEW ELEMENTS AFFECT GISCARD?

4. A. WE ASSUME THAT CHIRAC WILL BE ELECTED MAYOR OF
PARIS. THE TWO-ROUND VOTING SYSTEM WOULD WORK TOWARD
THIS RESULT. IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, CANDIDATES WHO COME IN
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PAGE 02 PARIS 03135 02 OF 03 011602Z

SECOND BEST WITHIN THE MAJORITY WILL PROBABLY CALL FOR THEIR SUPPORTERS TO VOTE FOR THE STRONGEST MAJORITY CANDIDATE ON THE SECOND ROUND. THE SAME WILL PROBABLY HAPPEN IN THE COUNCIL VOTE (SEE PARIS 3085). AT THE SAME TIME, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE LEFT WILL SPLIT ITS VOTE -- FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT SUCH A TACTIC WOULD SPELL TROUBLE FOR 1978, THE FAR MORE IMPORTANT ELECTIONS.

B. CHIRAC WILL HAVE ACQUIRED AN ADDITIONAL SPRINGBOARD FROM WHICH TO LAUNCH HIS POLITICAL FUTURE AND THE RPR WILL HAVE CONSOLIDATED ITS MAJORITY POSITION WITHIN THE MAJORITY. NEW MEMBERS, WHO WERE REPORTEDLY COMING IN AT A RATE OF 2,000 A DAY AFTER THE DECEMBER ASSIZES BUT BEGAN TO TAPER OFF THEREAFTER, WILL PICK UP AGAIN AND THE RPR WILL TAKE ON A NEW ELAN.

C. THE RPR WILL BE AN EVEN LESS ACCOMMODATING PARLIAMENTARY PARTNER FOR THE IR AND CENTRISTS, AND GISCARD'S PROGRAM, PARTICULARLY HIS MUCH VAUNTED REFORMS, WILL HAVE TO TAKE NOTE OF THIS FACT AND WILL PROBABLY SUFFER IN CONSEQUENCE. A CABINET RESHUFFLE AFTER THE MUNICIPALS IS PROBABLE, AND THE RPR WOULD EXPECT INCREASED REPRESENTATION.

D. EARLY ELECTIONS COULD BE GISCARD'S RECOURSE IF HE FELT THE RPR PRESSURE INTOLERABLE. SUCH A RECOURSE IS CERTAINLY NOT HIS PREFERENCE OR STYLE, AND HE HAS PUBLICLY REJECTED THIS ALTERNATIVE SEVERAL TIMES. BUT HE MAY PREFER TO TAKE HIS CHANCES IN AN ELECTION IF MEETING RPR DEMANDS AMOUNTED TO DENUING HIMSELF OF HIS OWN POLICIES AND BELIEFS.

5. CONCLUSIONS:

A. GISCARD COULD THUS FIND HIMSELF IN A SITUATION VAGUELY SIMILAR TO THAT WHICH WOULD EXIST IF THE LEFT

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PARIS 03135 02 OF 03 011602Z

WON IN 1978. BECAUSE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL ANOMALY OF A GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBLE TO THE PARLIAMENT AND A PRESIDENT ELECTED SEPARATELY BY UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE, THE PRESIDENT COULD BE LEFT STRANDED ON HIS ISLAND OF OUTDATED ELECTORAL LEGITIMACY, SURROUNDED BY A HOSTILE PARLIAMENT. IN THE CASE OF A STRONGER RPR NEXT SPRING, THE ANALOGY IS ONLY HALF VALID, FOR THE RPR WOULD NOT BE HOSTILE, ONLY MORE EXACTING OF ITS OWN VIEW OF FRANCE'S INTERESTS.

B. UP TO NOW, CHIRAC HAS GONE OUT OF HIS WAY TO

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PAGE 01 PARIS 03135 03 OF 03 011546Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 PARIS 03135

REPEAT HIS ALLEGIANCE TO THE PRESIDENCY AND HIS SUPPORT
OF THE BARRE PLAN, WHILE BARRE HAS TAKEN PAINS TO
POINT OUT THAT THERE ARE PRACTICALLY NO DIFFERENCES BET-
WEEN HIMSELF AND THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER. BUT WORDS
ARE CHEAP, AND ONE SUSPECTS BOTH MEN DOTH PROTEST TOO
STRONGLY. CHIRAC, AS A GOOD GAULLIST, CAN BE EXPECTED
TO SHOW RESTRAINT AND RESPECT AT LEAST FOR THE OFFICE OF
THE PRESIDENCY. BUT HIS ACTIONS ARE UNDERSTANDABLY PER-
CEIVED DIFFERENTLY. HE IS ALSO A FIGHTER AND A TOUGH
BARGAINER. THE TWO CONCEPTS ARE NOT INCOMPATIBLE. HE
WILL HAVE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BARGAINING TABLE A
MAN WITH THE MANY CARDS OF A CHIEF OF STATE AND A MAN
WHO WILL HAVE AWAKENED TO THE FACT THAT HIS POWER IS IN
PART SLIPPING FROM HIS HANDS. THE TWO MEN WILL HAVE AS
MANY REASONS TO WORK OUT A MODUS VIVENDI AS THEY HAVE
HAD IN THE PAST, BUT THE CARDS WILL HAVE BEEN REDEALT --
TO CHIRAC'S ADVANTAGE.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 PARIS 03135 03 OF 03 011546Z

C. FINALLY, ONE WILL HAVE TO FACTOR IN THE GROW-
ING POLITICAL PERSONALITY OF PRIME MINISTER BARRE.
ORIGINALLY BROUGHT IN TO SAVE FRANCE'S ECONOMY FROM
INFLATION, BARRE HAS SINCE BEEN IMPORTUNED TO COPE WITH
POLITICAL PROBLEMS NOT OF HIS OWN MAKING. HE HAS MORE
RECENTLY BEEN ASSUMING A POLITICAL PERSONALITY OF HIS
OWN, DESPITE HIS INDIRECT ASSOCIATION WITH GISCARD'S
TACTICAL ERRORS. CONSIDERED BY MUCH OF THE PUBLIC TO BE
A SERIOUS AND HONEST MAN, NOT TAINTED BY POLITICAL
MANEUVERING AND IN-FIGHTING, BARRE COULD IF HE CONTINUES
TO DEVELOP IMPROVE THE IMAGE OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT.
ALREADY HE HAS TAKEN SOME OF THE HEAT OFF OF GISCARD
WITH HIS REPEATED APPEARANCES AND INTERVIEWS, HAS TRIED
VALIANTLY (AND FAILED) TO COMPROMISE THE RPR AND THE IR/
CENTRISTS ON THE PARIS MAYOR ISSUE AND APPEARS TO REALIZE
THAT PARTY POLITICS CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM HIS ECONO-
MIC PLAN, WHICH STILL REMAINS HIS NUMBER ONE PRIORITY.
RUSH

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